



Living in the good of what we believe: practical pointers from James

Follow up on Session 6: In the world but not of the world

James has the following things to say about living in the world while not being of the world:

“Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the **world**.” (James 1:27)

“Listen, my dear brothers and sisters: has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the **world** to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him?” (James 2:5)

“You adulterous people, don’t you know that friendship with the **world** means enmity against God? Therefore, anyone who chooses to be a friend of the **world** becomes an enemy of God.” (James 4:4)

Jesus also had a lot to say on the subject:

“You are the salt of the **earth**... You are the light of the **world**...” (Matthew 5:13-16)

“(Jesus) said to them, ‘Go into all the **world** and preach the gospel to all creation’”. (Mark 16:15)

“Anyone who loves their life will lose it, while anyone who hates their life in this **world** will keep it for eternal life.” (John 12:25)

“If the **world** hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. If you belonged to the **world**, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the **world**, but I have chosen you out of the **world**.” (John 15:18&19a)

“I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this **world** you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the **world**.” (John 16:33)

“I will remain in the **world** no longer, but they are still in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name, the name you gave me, so that they may be one as we are one. I have given them your word and the **world** has

hated them, for they are not of the **world** any more than I am of the **world**. My prayer is not that you take them out of the **world** but that you protect them from the evil one. They are not of the **world**, even as I am not of it. As you sent me into the **world**, I have sent them into the **world**... that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the **world** may believe that you have sent me. I in them and you in me – so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the **world** will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.” (John 17:14-18,21&23)

Other NT writers have a lot to say on the subject, too, and the following passages provide examples of the main threads running through what they have to say to us:

“Do not conform to the pattern of this **world**, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will.” (Romans 12:2)

“Brothers and sisters, I could not address you as people who live by the Spirit but as people who are still **worldly** – mere infants in Christ... For since there is jealousy and quarrelling among you, are you not **worldly**? Are you not acting like mere humans?” 1 Corinthians 3:1&3

“Now ... our conscience testifies that we have conducted ourselves in the **world**, and especially in our relations with you, with integrity and godly sincerity. We have done so, relying not on **worldly** wisdom but on God’s grace.” (2 Corinthians 1:12)

“... the grace of God... teaches us to say ‘No’ to ungodliness and **worldly** passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for...the appearing of ... Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.” (Titus 2:11-14)

To consider...

As for earlier sessions, I have listed some suggestions for following up on the material from Session 6. As before, I suggest that you focus on (parts of) just one or two rather than planning to touch on all of them. May God bless you richly as you wait on him!

1. Read through the scriptures above, inviting God to speak them into your life. Is there anything that particularly catches your attention? What do you think God may want you to do to live more in the good of what he has shown you? Resolve to follow up on what he tells you.
2. Do you think you might have a tendency to interact with the **world** by adopting (i) a *chameleon strategy* (adjusting to blend in with the behaviour, values and priorities of those around you) or (ii) a *siege mentality* (minimising your interactions with the **world**, retreating to the Christian ghetto ASAP and “pulling up the drawbridge” to shut the **world** out)? You might want to consider the question in the various contexts you commonly encounter: at home, at work, at

school, among friends etc. Is there anything God is asking you to adjust?

3. What was your reaction to the clip I played of the concert pianist playing *Twinkle, twinkle little star* with the little boy? Did you notice how worried the little boy's parents looked when the concert pianist arrived and how their worry turned to joy when they saw how he dealt with the situation? Can you imagine being the little boy? When you are grappling with a challenge that seems beyond you, can you imagine Father God coming alongside you like the concert pianist did with the little boy? Why not invite Father God to come alongside you now as you face a particular challenge. Give him time to speak to you and listen out for his affirmation, encouragement, reassurance, guidance, correction and – especially – his delight in you.
4. The scriptures encourage us to set our minds on what the Spirit desires (Romans 8:5); to live by the Spirit; and to keep in step with the Spirit (Galatians 5:25). How do you suppose you might grow in doing these things? Take some time to prayerfully soak in these scriptures, asking that same Spirit who is described in the passages to guide you as you think and pray.
5. Paul wrote to the Romans, “Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will” (Romans 12:2). Would you like to grow in testing and approving what God's will is in your life? If so, spend some time prayerfully considering what you could do to encourage the transformation that is needed to renew your mind.

To consider concerning the whole series...

The aim of this series based on James was to encourage and equip us to live more and more in the good of what we believe or, to use James' words, to be “doers of God's word and not hearers only” (James 1:22). I do hope you have found the series stimulating, encouraging, enlightening and enjoyable but I have been praying that it will also have a lasting impact on our lives. It would be ironic if a series aimed at helping us to be doers of God's word left us stuck at being hearers only! But – as I emphasised in the first session, and repeated periodically across the series – learning to be more effective and fruitful doers of God's word does not just happen, by default. Rather, it involves engaging in a sustained process in partnership with Father God and the follow up notes I have written in support of the various sessions are intended to help you identify manageable steps that you might take to encourage the process.

Do take a little time to prayerfully consider what God would have you do with what he has drawn your attention to during the series. And then make some plans to implement what he shows you.

If you would like to dig deeper into the book of James, I can thoroughly recommend the *Bible Speaks Today* volume on James by Alec Motyer. It comprises a solid exposition of the text combined with invaluable suggestions on practical application. For a rather lighter – but also very practical read – you might consider *Living on purpose: 30 days on the book of James* by Cathy Madavan. I'm very grateful to Pat and Dennis Davies for bringing it to my attention. They tell me that the author taught the material at a *Spring Harvest* event a couple of years back.

Thanks for reading this far! May our Lord bless you richly in his service and may his kingdom grow - to his glory – as you implement whatever he has been teaching you through the book of James.

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